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ABSTRACT

This paper examines current approaches to conceptualizing and studying fathers' interactions with infants from three perspectives: (1) Spence and Helmreich's current trait theory of masculinity and femininity; (2) differentiated levels of inquiry into fatherhood; and (3) Bronfenbrenner's social ecology of the infant. Detailed discussions of each of these three perspectives suggest that an understanding of fatherhood and the family in early infancy requires distinctions among socioculturally given roles, the self-concepticns that parents utilize for defining their own roles in relation to each other and to the infant, and behaviorally based approaches that focus on the actual behaviors parents engage in with infants and the nature and quality of these patterns of parenting. An analysis of recent research on invididuals' self-reports of their masculine and feminine characteristics indicates that this is a more useful way to look at parent characteristics and behavior than is role classification by "father" vs "mother." It is suggested that a multivariate and longitudinal strategy for conceptualizing and investigating the determinants of patterns of parenting (including consideration of the entire social matrix surrounding the infant) is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of family/infant interactions. Specific directions for future research are included. (CM)

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Fathers' interactions with young infants: Current issues and future directions for research

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Over the past several years we have seen a dramatic increase in interest in the father's role in the family during early infancy and in his involvement in caregiving and affectionate behavior with young infants (cf., Lamb, 1976; Walters, 1976). Concommitantly, we are seeing a breakdown of traditional stereotypes which have depicted the father of young infants as a kind of vestigial appendage of the mother-infant dyad (Nash, 1976). The father is becoming recognized as a significant and integral component of the family unit during infancy and, in that capacity, is seen as having an important influence on the relationship between the mother and infant and on the infant's development.

In light of the extensive attention to the father in current research on the family in early infancy, we must critically examine our approaches to conceptualizing and studying "the father" during this early period of infant life. The purpose of this paper is to do so from three perspectives: 1) a current trait theory of masculinity and femininity (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), 2) differentiated levels of inquiry into fatherhood, and 3) the social ecology of the infant (Bronfenbrenner, 1975, 1977).

Several considerations argue for this kind of critical reexamination. The first of these is the finding from observational studies of parent-infant interaction in the early months of infant life that fathers are very active partners in these interactions and very few stable, behavioral differences are evident between mothers and fathers (Parke & O'Leary, 1976; Parke & Sawin, 1976, 1977). Further, the few significant differences between mothers and fathers have not been large. Perhaps even more important, analyses of

the contingency of the parents' responses to behavioral cues from the infant (i.e., parental sensitivity and responsiveness) indicate that fathers are as responsive to most of their infants' behaviors as are mothers (Parke & Sawin, 1975, 1977). These findings are quite descrepant from traditional views of fathers' behavior with young infants (Parke & Sawin, 1976) and thus support a reconsideration of "the father" in early infancy.

In addition, these findings suggest that there may be more variation in parenting behavior among parents (i.e., individual differences regardless of gender) than there is between groups of fathers and groups of mothers (i.e., groups of parents classified by gender). This is particularly true for such behavioral variables as holding patterns; tactual, auditory, and visual stimulation; and affectionate behaviors such as smiling, patting, and stroking. The implication of these findings is that a better understanding of the determinants of patterns of parent-infant interaction is not best served by classifications of parents defined or conceptualized on the basis of the parents' biological sex alone.

Parenting from the perspective of masculinity and femininity.

Why are there so few differences between mothers' and fathers' characteristic styles of interacting with their young infants? Cross-cultural and historical evidence, paternal behavior in sub-human primates and other animals, and biological considerations (physical, hormonal, and other genetic differences between males and females) would lead us to expect that parent gender would be associated with highly differentiated behavior by human mothers and fathers in parent-infant interactions (see Parke & Sawin, 1976 for a brief review of these issues, and see Lynn, 1974; Nash, 1976; Redican, 1976; West & Konner, 1976 for more extensive reviews).

An answer to this question may be found in a recent trait theory of masculinity and femininity developed by Spence and Helmreich (1978). This approach to masculininity and femininity focuses on individuals' conceptions of themselves on clusters of "instrumental" and "expressive" personality characteristics. Since, according to stereotype and to self report, men are more strongly instrumental than women and women are more expressive than men, these characteristics are identified as masculine and feminine respectively.

These investigators have demonstrated not only that these dimensions are essentially independent within each sex but also that sex differences are quantitative rather than qualitative. That is, the average man is not nonexpressive but merely somewhat less expressive than the average woman; similarly, the average woman is not noninstrumental but merely somewhat less instrumental than the average man. This dualistic model which treats these personality characteristics as separate dimensions acknowledges that an individual may have both masculine and feminine traits to varying degrees and that personality measures of gender-related traits must be constructed to permit the assessment and classification of individuals along both masculine and feminine dimensions. Using this strategy, Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975) proposed a four-fold classification scheme based on the self evaluations of personal attributes by respondents. These classifications are masculine (high masculine--low feminine), feminine (low masculine--high feminine), androgynous (high masculine--high feminine) and undifferentiated (low masculine--low feminine).

The implications of this approach for understanding the patterns of parenting that mothers and fathers adopt in relation to their young infants

are evident from a recent study by Bem and her associates (Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976). College men and women were classified as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated based on their responses to the Bem Sex Role Inventory and according to the classification scheme proposed by Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975). At a later date, each of the subjects were observed during a ten minute period in which they were left alone with a human infant on the pretense that the investigators were studying infant responsiveness. A summary measure of behavioral nurturance was derived for each subject based on a time sampling of a variety of affectionate behaviors; smiling at the infant, talking to the infant, kissing and nuzzling, ventral holding, affectionate stimulation (tickling, patting, stretching). The analyses of this nurturance summary variable revealed no differences in the nurturance of men and women in their interactions with the infant. That is, there were no significant differences in nurturant behaviors with the infant based on the classification of subjects by biological sex. However, a significant main effect was found for the classification of the subjects on the psychological dimensions of masculinity, femininity, androgyny and undifferentiated. Post hoc tests revealed that: 1) feminine men and women were more nurturant than masculine and undifferentiated men and women; 2) androgynous men and women were more nurturant than masculine and undifferentiated men and women; and 3) androgynous and feminine men and women were not different in their nurturance of the infant nor were masculine and undifferentiated groups different. These data indicate that the adults' personal construct notions about their masculinity and femininity were more strongly related to how nurturantly they behaved with the infant than was their biological sex. Note that these findings indicate that the men and

the women who scored above the median on the femininity dimension (i.e., the feminine and androgynous subjects) were significantly more nurturant with the infant than men and women who scored below the median on femininity (i.e., the masculine and undifferentiated subjects). Also important, is the fact that the subjects who scored above the median on the masculine dimension, if they also scored above the median on the feminine dimension (i.e., the androgynous subjects), were no less nurturant than the subjects who scored above the median on the feminine dimension but not the masculine dimension (i.e., the feminine subjects). This finding indicates that self-reported masculine personality characteristics represented by high instrumentality did not preclude or interfere with the expression of the feminine expressive behaviors of those men and women who saw themselves as both instrumental and expressive (i.e., androgynous).

Findings such as these, and the cogent arguments and construct validity of the personal attributions approach in the work of Spence and Helmreich (1978) suggest that the dualistic model of the psychological dimensions regarding masculinity, femininity and androgyny may be more useful for describing parent characteristics and behavior in relation to infants than the role classification of "father" vs. "mother". Parent personality characteristics defined by this scheme would be expected to account for additional variance in parent behavior with infants (among parents and between groups of parents) beyond the variance accounted for in comparisons between groups defined by "sex of parent" (i.e., mothers vs. fathers).

Specifically in reference to fathers' relation with their infants and children, the personal attributes that comprise androgyny may reflect a flexibility or adaptability (Spence & Helmreich, 1978) that permits the father to behave in ways that have been traditionally thought to be masculine

as well as those that are feminine depending on the situation or the task at hand. That is, androgynous fathers may be just as prepared as masculine men and more prepared than feminine people to adopt instrumental parenting roles in the circumstances where those behaviors are required. Similarly, androgynous men may be just as able as feminine individuals to adopt an expressive role involving sensitivity to others' emotions, responsiveness, affection, and nurturance in contexts where those behaviors are appropriate. I refer particularly, of course, to fathers' behavior towards their young infants.

In light of the foregoing discussion and of the failure of observational research to find the kinds of differences between mothers' and fathers' patterns of interaction with young infants that would be expected on the basis of historical, cross-cultural, and comparative approaches to parent behavior with infants, the utility of distinguishing several levels of inquiry becomes evident. Specifically, for purposes of research and discussion of parenting styles with young infants, three levels are proposed: 1) parent roles as they are defined by society; 2) parent characteristics defined in terms of individual and personal self-concepts of parenthood; and 3) parenting defined in terms of the actual behavior and activities engaged in by the parents. These levels of inquiry and their relevance for studying fathers will be elaborated in the following sections.

The father: Levels of definition and inquiry.

1) Historical, cultural, and sociological approaches. At this level, fatherhood is defined in terms of structurally given demands. This is the classic definition of roles--normative expectations or rules for behavior, duties, and responsibilities including taboos. These role expectations are

"normative" in the sense of shared values and expectations by a majority of individuals in a given culture. They define the role ascribed to fathers in a given culture or society at a given time. This approach generally defines fatherhood in relation to, or in contrast to, motherhood. Defined in this way, parenthood is something outside of the individual--it is a set of pressures and facilitations that channel, guide, impede, and support parents' functioning in the family.

2) Self-concepts and personal expectations approaches. Here, fatherhood is defined as the individual father's orientation or conception of the kind of parent he is or wants to be in the family system: i.e., his inner definition of his functions in the family and his relationship to the infant and the mother. Defined in this way, fathering or parenting is an aspect of the person--the person's cognitions and feelings about himself and how he wants to be as a father. These self-concepts may or may not correspond to cultural norms or may do so only to varying degrees.

3) Behavioral approaches. Fathering is defined here on the basis of the action or behavior of the individual father--actions toward other members of the family. In this definition, fathering refers to the ways in which the father behaves with the infant and the mother. Here as in definition 2 above, fathering is defined in terms of the person; in this case, in terms of behavioral characteristics of the person (i.e., in terms of what he does) rather than in terms of the prevailing norms for fathering (i.e., what he is "supposed" to do) or his self concept of his fathering activities. This behavior may or may not correspond to cultural norms and/or the fathers' self-concepts.

Much of the research on fathers during the infancy of their offspring has operated with a unitary conception of fathers and fatherhood as though there was an isomorphic relation, or at least a great degree of convergence

among these levels of fatherhood. There seems to have been an implicit assumption that the self-concept that fathers held for the kind of parent they are or want to be was an internalization of the cultural prescriptions for fathers and that the ways that fathers behaved with their infants was determined by these internalized norms.

Although it is not unreasonable to expect some convergence between these levels of dealing with fatherhood, to assume a priori that there is a close convergence between them and that assessment of fatherhood at one of these levels serves as a substitute or accurate predictor of fatherhood at the other levels is premature and apt to be misleading. Instead the relation among the three levels of dealing with fatherhood should be maintianed as an empirical problem for study and, in the meantime, we should make the distinctions indicated by these definitions in both our theory and research into fatherhood in infancy. We should eliminate the single unitary conception of "the father" and give independent conceptual and operational status to the three different levels of defining fatherhood.

Some evidence in support of distinctions among levels of inquiry into fatherhood.

Historical, cultural, and sociological approaches. What is a father? He is a man, he works primarily outside of the home, and he is the material and perhaps the emotional supporter of the mother. He has traditionally been depicted as uninterested and uninvolved in infant care and affection (Parke & Sawin, 1976). He doesn't become an active parent until his infant grows into childhood.

This is a fair characterization of the conventional Western definition of the father during infancy. Further, this description of the father is

consistent with the most prevalent social theory of parental roles (Parson & Bales, 1955). In this theory mothers and fathers are distinguished by their functioning in the family. Fathers serve primarily an instrumental function and mothers serve primarily an expressive function. It is further argued that the father is the provider for his wife and children, the disciplinarian, teacher of instrumental activity for his children, and the socializer of the children and adolescents for assuming roles outside the family. He is viewed as the representative within the family of the authority of the larger society outside the family. He is, above all, the man of the house.

Such role descriptions of fathers and mothers are consistent with the prevalent assumption that women are more suited to the tasks of parenting during the infancy of their offspring. Correspondingly, Nash (1965) has noted that the father has become vestigial during the early periods of the development of his children, and Josselyn (1956) has noted, it is considered inappropriate in our culture for fathers to be nurturant toward their infants. There appears to be persuasive notion in many cultures that fathers are much less capable of appropriate parenting behavior with infants--they lack "know-how" and are inadequately sensitive to infants' emotional needs for warmth and nurturance.

Based on social scientists' descriptions of these cultural stereotypes and on sociological theory, the picture that we get of the father is a bit like a quarterback of the football team: 1) he is instrumental--he calls the shots and makes things happen; 2) he is tough and strong--he is thus too rough and clumsy to handle infants; and, finally, 3) he is primarily concerned with winning the game for his team (family) and not with the emotional

well being of the members of the team in the process--that is the mother's job. Though this somewhat over-stated stereotype of the father in infancy has firm precedence historically in western cultures (see Parke & Sawin, 1976 for a review of these issues) as well as in the predominant contemporary sociological theory of parent roles (cf., Parson & Bales, 1955), it was noted earlier in this paper and discussed at greater length elsewhere (Parke & Sawin, 1976), that this is not the picture that emerges from observational studies of patterns of paternal behavior in interaction with young infants. The next sections of this paper will deal with the extent to which there is a correspondence between this stereotype of fathers, their personal conception of their relationship to their infants, and their behavior in interaction with them.

Self-concepts and personal expectations. How do fathers' conceptions of their relationship with their infants and wives fit with the prevailing social-cultural stereotype of fathers? In dissertation research conducted with a sub-sample of fathers involved in a longitudinal study of father-infant interaction during the first several months of infant life (Parke & Sawin, 1977), Cordell (1978) interviewed 25 middle class, white fathers about their conceptions of fatherhood and their relationships with their infants. The interviews were conducted when the infants were three to four months old. The questions were open-ended and the responses were spontaneous. The observational data from the dyadic interactions of these fathers with their infants were also available.

One of the questions asked of the fathers addressed the issue of the kinds of functions they saw for themselves in relation to their young children. The fathers' two most frequent responses (16 of 25 fathers) were (a) to

recognize and be sensitive to the child's emotional needs and (b) to be a companion to the child by showing an interest in their activities, spending time together, and sharing the child's happiness or joy. The next most frequent functions mentioned by these fathers (14 of 25) were to be a provider and to socialize and discipline their young children. In contrast, only four of the 25 fathers described their function as teacher and only one of the fathers saw his function as the male role model or as he also said, "the male parent".

In response to a question about the fathers' conceptions of his function specifically with his young infant, all of the fathers mentioned routine infant care as being part of their conception of their fatherhood. Twenty of the 25 fathers mentioned infant stimulation, and 11 of the fathers specifically mentioned affection giving. In constrast, only four of the 25 fathers included any reference to teaching basic skills as a part of their conception of their function as a father to their infants.

The fathers were also asked to compare themselves as parents to their wives as parents. The question was designed to assess how many of the fathers viewed themselves as the same as their wives, or at least similar, and how many fathers viewed themselves as basically different than their wives as a parent. Only two fathers felt that they were clearly different than their wives due to a basic differences between fathers and mothers in their "nature" or instincts. Most of the fathers noted both similarities and differences between themselves and their wives as parents of their young infants. Three fathers stated that there were no basic differences between them and their wives in relation to their infant:

Though the sample is small and is composed of a somewhat select group of fathers, these self reports indicate that there may be little correspondence

between fathers' conceptions of their "fatherhood" and the sociocultural stereotype of the father presented earlier. Cordell (1978) notes several significant contrasts. The large proportion (16/25) of fathers in this sample who specifically mentioned recognizing their child's emotional needs as an important function of their relationship with their child is considerably higher than would be predicted from the socio-cultural theories such as Parson and Bales (1955) theory of parent roles. This expressive function of parenting is almost exclusively seen as the primary function of motherhood and is not usually considered from these perspectives as a dimension of fatherhood. The low frequency with which the fathers in Cordell's sample mentioned teaching or the fostering of basic skills in their children and infants is also notably discrepant with prevailing theories of the father's role in the family.

Behavioral perspectives on fathering. How do fathers behave with their young infants? In what ways are patterns of paternal activity different or similar to patterns of maternal activity? As described briefly at the beginning of this paper, findings form observations of parent-infant interactions during bottle feeding and play sessions involving mother-infant dyads and father-infant dayds have yielded only a few differences between the frequencies and durations of mothers' and fathers' caregiving, affectionate, and stimulating behaviors (Parke & O'Leary, 1976; Parke & Sawin, 1975, 1977). During the neonatal period, mothers engaged in actual feeding (putting the nipple in infant's mouth or attempting to put it there) for a longer total duration during a ten minute feeding session than fathers (Parke & O'Leary, 1976; Parke & Sawin, 1975). Mothers also wiped their infant's face or hands more than fathers did during feeding sessions in this early period

(Parke & Sawin, 1975, 1977) and mothers engaged more frequently in routine caregiving (checks, adjusts, grooms) during play sessions in the hospital than did fathers (Parke & Sawin, 1977). On the other hand, fathers looked at their infants for a longer total duration during feeding in this early period and maintained more eye-to-eye contact with their infants than did mothers (Parke & Sawin, 1975). Fathers also provided more visual stimulation (shows toy) and auditory stimulation (e.g., rattles toy to make sounds for infant) during play sessions in the neonatal period than mothers did (Parke & Sawin, 1977).

Thus, during the very earliest period of infancy, there appears to be some differentiation between mothers' and fathers' patterns of parent activity with their infants but the number of behaviors which differentiate mothers and fathers are few and the absolute amount of difference in the frequency and durations of these behaviors, though statistically significant, is not large. Mothers appear to engage in more of the activities that we think of as routine caretaking, and fathers appear to be more attentive to their infants and provide them with more visual and auditory stimulation.

The next question addressed in this line of research was whether these early differences between mothers and fathers in their interactions with their infants are stable; that is, would they hold over time (the early months of infancy) and contexts (hospital vs. home). In the most recent study of this series (Parke & Sawin, 1977), observations of parent-infant interactions similar to those made in the hospital during the neonatal period were also made in the families' homes during the fourth week and fourth month following the infants' births.

The differences between mothers and fathers that remained stable over this period were similar to, but fewer in number, than the differences observed during the neonatal period. Mothers continued to engage in more routine caregiving (checks, adjusts, grooms) than fathers, and more of the mothers kissed their infants during feeding and play than fathers. Fathers, as compared to mothers, engaged more frequently in affectionate visual stimulation of their infants in the form of mimicking or imitating their infants facial expressions and mouth movements.

Though there are few differences between mothers' and fathers' patterns of interacting with their newborn infants, and even fewer mother-father differences that are stable over the first four months of the infant's life, there is some indication in these observational behavioral data of characteristic differences between mothers and fathers. Notwithstanding, the overall picture that emerges from these studies of parent-infant interaction in early infancy is that fathers are active participants in the care and affection of their infants during dyadic interactions in both feeding and play contexts.

How does this "behavioral" picture jibe with predominant sociocultural views of fathers? Not very closely. The only correspondence between these two levels of examining "fatherhood" is the tendency for mothers to engage in more routine caregiving than fathers and the greater number of mothers who kissed their infants during their interactions with them. But overall, fathers were no less affectionate, sensitive, and responsive to their infants then mothers (Parke & Sawin, 1975, 1977) and did not show significant differences in the frequency and duration of most parenting behaviors during interactions with their infants (Parke & O'Leary, 1976; Parke & Sawin, 1975, 1977). The few indications of differentiation between mothers' and fathers'

characteristic patterns of interactions with their young infants are certainly not as great as would be expected from the sociocultural stereotypes of mothers and fathers.

The correspondence between the patterns of fathers' behavior in father-infant interaction and fathers' personal construct notions of "fatherhood" are not so discrepant. That is, there appears to be a greater relation between these fathers, activities in father-infant interactions, and their self reports of their functions than with sociocultural stereotypes of fathers.

For example, all of the fathers interviewed by Cordell (1978) mentioned routine infant care as one of their activities. Correspondingly, the observed differences between mothers and fathers in these behaviors during parent-infant dyadic interactions were small and evident during the play session but not during feeding sessions over the first four months of infant life. The second most frequent paternal activity mentioned by the fathers was infant stimulation. This was one of the few behavioral differences between mothers and fathers that was more typical of fathers during the neonatal period and over the four months of infancy. Finally, while only about half of the fathers interviewed specifically mentioned affection giving as part of their paternal activities, the observations of the fathers' behavior with their infants indicated that fathers were just as affectionate except for kissing their infants.

Thus, there is some correspondence between these fathers self-concepts of their functions with their infants and the behavioral measures of their activities in father-infant interactions, but the correspondence is not isomorphic. Thus, approaching fatherhood in infancy from the self-concept

perspective will not necessarily yield reliable and valid indices for predicting fathers' behavior, though the relation between these levels of examining fatherhood certainly warrants more consideration and research.

In conjunction with these issues, and in response to the emerging perspective of the "social ecology of development" (Bronfenbrenner, 1975, 1977), a third consideration in conceptualizing and defining the father needs to be examined. We should view the father not as an isolated element of the infant's social environment, but as one of several interacting components of the social system that constitutes that environment. Each of these persons, or components, plays a role in relation to both the infant and to one another. This matrix of social relations and its impact on infant development cannot be understood by examining only the relation between a single individual and the infant; rather we must examine the entire social matrix of the family. The "whole" can only be understood in terms of the relations among the "parts".

In adopting such a strategy, we should consider such factors as: 1) the number of caregivers; 2) the amount and quality of their involvement with the infant; 3) the reciprocal influences and mutual regulation processes operating among the caregivers and the infant; and, finally, but not least important, 4) characteristics and behaviors of the infant that influence the behavior of the caregivers and their relationship with the infant and with one another. The remainder of this paper will be a more thorough discussion of this issue, with a focus on defining and conceptualizing parenting for purposes of research on the family and on infant development.

Parenting in infancy from a social-ecological perspective.

This issue will be explicated with some examples from recent research and some anecdotes from our experiences with parents of young infants.

Specifically, the following aspects of the infants' social ecology will be addressed: 1) the context and nature of parenting task; 2) characteristics of the infant; 3) the relationship between the mother and father, particularly in relation to the infant; and 4) some influences that parents appear to have on one another's behavior toward the infant over time (i.e., second order effects).

Context or tasks of parenting. In our most recent study of parent-infant interactions in early infancy (Parke & Sawin, 1977), we observed parent and infant behaviors in both a feeding session and a "play" session. As we had expected, there was more variation in parents' behavior in the play context than in the feeding context. That is, we obtained a greater number of significant effects due to sex of parent, sex of infant, ordinal position of infant, and time of measurement in the analyses of the behavioral data obtained during the play sessions. In addition, the behavior of mother-father couples was less similar in the play context. That is, there were fewer significant positive correlations between the behaviors of mother-father pairs in the play context than were obtained between the behaviors of mothers and fathers in the feeding context. These findings of greater variation in parental interaction styles and the concordent findings for greater dissimilarity between individual parent-couples in the play context as compared to the feeding context are not surprising. In the feeding context, the tasks of parents are far more clearly and narrowly defined than in a play context. The primary task of feeding is to make the infant comfortable and be sure he or she gets enough milk. This parenting task involves feeding behaviors with which most parents are familiar or are at least aware of, they are fairly routine, and tend to be stereotyped. Thus, feeding situations seem

to place constraints on the variations in parenting behavior that become evident in a play context. This hypothesis suggests the need to evaluate mothers' and fathers' behavior with their infants in several of the contexts in which they occur in order to obtain a more salient and comprehensive picture of variations in parents' behavior and thus a better assessment of the infants' social ecology. Observations of feeding interactions alone are almost certainly insufficient for these purposes.

Infant characteristics. There is currently an emerging recognition of the infants' influences on parent behavior (cf., Lewis & Rosenblum, 1974). That is, the infant is a significant determinant of its own social ecology. Several infant characteristics have been shown in our own research to elicit differential behavior by parents in parent-infant interactions (Parke & Sawin, 1975, 1977).

The infant's gender is one such characteristic. During the newborn period, female infants receive more physical stimulation (parent changes infant's position; parent touches/moves part of infant) than male infants and female infants are held in the ventral position ("belly-to-belly") and are more frequently pulled into a well supported, snuggly, "hold close" position (Parke & Sawin, 1975). In examining these "sex-of-infant" differences in parents' behavior over the first four months, we found that during feeding sessions parents looked at female infants more frequently and during play sessions female infants were offered a pacifier more than male infants. Further, parents talked to someone other than the infant more frequently while playing with a female infant than with a male infant and they held their male infants close and snugly during play more than their female infants (Parke & Sawin, 1978).

More frequent than main effects for infant gender over these early months were interaction effects of this factor with parent gender (Parke & Sawin, 1977). These interaction effects indicate that infant gender plays a differential modifying influence of mothers' and fathers' patterns of interacting with their infants. Namely, mothers' and fathers' behaviors are differentiated by infant gender in a complementary way: fathers behave differently with sons than with daughters while mothers' behavior with daughters and sons appears to be reciprocal to fathers. For example, during play we found that mothers held their sons close and snugly more frequently and for longer periods than their daughters. Conversely, fathers tended to hold their daughters close to them more than their sons. In contrast, for visual attending and stimulation behaviors, fathers consistently favored their sons and mothers more often favored their daughters. However, there was little differentiation in mothers' and fathers' behavior toward their sons and daughters for routine caregiving behaviors.

These findings indicate that mothers' and fathers' affection giving is more focused on their opposite-sexed infant while their attending and stimulation behaviors are more frequent with their same-sexed infant.

Other infant characteristics appear to be relevant to parents' behavior in interaction with their infants. Infant cuddliness, as measured in the Brazelton Neonatal Assessment Scale (Brazelton, 1973) was positively correlated to the amount of time mothers looked at their infants during a feeding session in the neonatal period, the frequency with which they engaged in eye-to-eye contact with their infants, the amount of time they held their infants in the ventral position, and the frequency with which they touched/moved (affectionate tactual/kinesthetic stimulation) and, most interestingly, with the frequency of mothers kissing their infants (Parke & Sawin, 1975).

Similarly, fathers more frequently engaged in eye-to-eye contact with their cuddly infants, held them in the ventral position more, and were more likely to kiss them (Parke & Sawin, 1975).

Similar relations were found between parents' behavior and an informal rating of the infant's "cuteness" made by the Brazelton Scale administrater in this same study. Infants who were rated higher on the cuteness scale had parents who maintained eye-to-eye contact with them more frequently, were more likely to be kissed by their parents, were held in the ventral position more by their mothers, and received more affectionate tactual/kinesthetic stimulation from their fathers (Parke & Sawin, 1975).

These findings of relations between infant characteristics such as sex, cuddliness, and cuteness and parent behaviors in parent-infant interactions indicate the importance of considering the infant as a significant component of the social matrix which determines the quality of the infant's social ecology. The infant is clearly a contributor to the nature and quality of patterns of parent behavior.

Family composition. The number of people involved in infant care is an additional factor that may be a significant component of the infant's social ecology. Of particular importance here is the availability and nature of an extended family arrangement. Since there are little data bearing on this issue, the significance of this factor will be demonstrated with an anecdotal example.

We recently went into the home of a young couple with a two month old infant to videotape mother-infant and father-infant interactions in order to prepare training materials for our observers. At the time we were in this home, the maternal grandmother was living with the family. During our visit, she stayed on the periphery of the action, watching her daughter feeding

her infant and observing with some amusement our videoequipment and recording activities. This passive observation by the grandmother lasted until it was the father's turn to feed the infant. At the instant that the mother began to hand the infant over to the father, the grandmother moved swiftly forward and intercepted the infant before the father could take hold of his infant. After some explanation by the mother to the grandmother that we were there to observe the infant while being fed by the father, the grandmother reluctantly gave up the infant to the father, but hovered over the father during the entire time that he held and fed the infant. At any point when the infant appeared to be getting fussy, the grandmother would begin to reach for the infant. When the father finally handed the infant back to the mother, the grandmother recessed into the background again.

The point to be made from this example is that the behavior of other family members living in the home with the new parents will very likely be a significant determinant of the behavior of the parents with their infant. While the presence of other family members may be supportive and contribute positively to the overall quality of the infant's social ecology, it may also serve to determine the amount and quality of involvement that parents, especially the father, have with their infant.

Second order effects. The effects of the behavior of one caregiver toward another and the relationship between the caregivers are often evident in the behavior and relationship of each of the caregivers with the infant. That is, parents influence the nature of each others' interactions with their infants. For example, Pederson (1975) has reported a significant correlation between the father's positive feelings about his wife as a mother with her skill in caregiving with her infant. While the "direction of influence" of this relationship is not discernable from these data, such

findings argue for including the parents' relationship as a significant component of descriptions of the infant's social ecology and as a factor in studies of parenting behavior.

Further support for this argument comes from data obtained by Parke and O'Leary (1976) who observed mothers and fathers interactions with their neonates while each parent was alone with their infant and again when the parents were together with the infant. These investigators found that the mother engaged in more exploration of her infant and smiled more when the father was present than when she was alone with her infant. It thus appears that the father's presence during the mother's interactions with her infant had a positive influence on the mother's interest in the infant and on her own affect while interacting with her infant.

Note, however, that the extent to which the father's involvement in the early family triad has a positive influence on the mother's relation with her infant may depend on the way the mother defines her parenting role. That is, if the mother sees herself as the primary or the exclusive caregiver for her infant, the father's efforts to become actively involved in the care and affection of his infant may not be well received by the mother.

On the other hand, if the mother defines her role as that of one of two parents who willingly share the care and affection of the infant, the father's active involvement in these activities will be well received by the mother and may even enhance her relationship with the infant. The father's involvement in sharing some of the responsibilities of infant care may provide the mother with rest and relief and allow her to interact with her infant at those times when she is comfortable and relaxed. In addition, the process of sharing <u>per se</u> may enhance both parents' feelings about their infant.

Such sharing of the tasks of infancy appears to have other influences on the parents' behavior as well. In our observations of mothers' and fathers' interactions with their infants over the first four months of the infants' lives (Parke & Sawin, 1977), we noted some interesting shifts over time in the parents' behaviors in interactions with their infants that suggested that parents may simultaneously serve as models for each other's behaviors as well as learning from each other. For example, comparisons of mothers' and fathers' caretaking behaviors (e.g., checks, diapers, grooms) during the play session indicated that mothers engaged in more caretaking in the hospital observation while fathers engage in more caretaking at the three week observation. By the time of the three months observation, however, fathers and mothers engaged in similar amounts of caretaking during play with their infant.

Parents' auditory stimulation of their infants during the play session was characterized by the same trend evident in several of the stimulation variables. At time one, fathers more frequently than mothers jiggled or rattled the toy for their infant to hear, but by time two at three weeks, mothers were providing this auditory stimulation more often than fathers, and at the three months visit, the differences between mothers and fathers was very small.

Overall, the parent gender by time of measurement (i.e., parent experience and infant age) interactions revealed trends in shifting patterns of mothers' and fathers' interactions with their infants over the first months of infant life in which the direction of the differences between mothers and fathers at each time point was a function of the type of caregiving activity being examined. These trends indicated a shift from early stereotyped behavior (mothers giving their infants more care and affection

and fathers giving more stimulation) to reversed or more homogeneous patterns by four months.

These indications of reversals and convergence in parent behavior suggest that mutual modeling effects are operating in the family system during the early period of infancy. It appears that, as parents experience the caring and stimulation of their infant together, they adopt the behaviors of their mates. Parents seem to learn from each other and, at the same time, provide a model for each other's learning.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been three-fold: 1) to suggest the added utility to our understanding of characteristic styles of parenting of classifying parents on the basis of personal attributions to themselves along the psychologically relevant dimensions of masculinity and femininity in addition to classifying parents on the basis of gender; 2) to argue for more carefully conceived and more highly differentiated conceptualizations and inquiry of fatherhood in early infancy; and 3) to indicate the need to view early parenting and infant development from a broad social perspective, namely, the infant's social ecology--a dynamic and changing social system consisting of a matrix of social relationships involving all of the persons in the infant's environment, including the infant.

Such strategies for exploring and understanding fatherhood and the family in early infancy require distinctions among socioculturally given roles, the self-conceptions that parents utilize for defining their own role in relation to each other and in relation to the infant, and behaviorally based approaches that focus on the actual behaviors that parents engage in with infants and the nature and quality of these patterns of parenting. These sources of data

are not isomorphic; nor are they necessarily interchangeable--each is important for understanding the family in early infancy, but the extent to which they are interrelated, and the significance of each of these levels as an influence on the other, must be viewed as an empirical question for further study.

In a similar vein, the extent to which the designations of caregivers such as "fathers", "mothers", "aunts", or "grandmothers" are useful to our understanding of the infant's social ecology and of patterns of parenting behavior is also an empirical question. Recent research on individual's self-reports of their masculine and feminine characteristics suggests that caregivers' personal conceptions of themselves and their relationship with the infant may provide a better means of understanding their behavior with infants.

Finally, a multivariate and longitudinal strategy for conceptualizing and investigating the determinants of patterns of parenting is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the family in early infancy. This broadened perspective must include consideration of a large number of factors that comprise the infant's social ecology. These include characteristics of all of the family members (including the infant), the nature of the family arrangement, the relations among the members of the family unit, and the second-order effects of each person on the other persons as they are mediated through a third person. Such a strategy places the study of the father in infancy within the context of the entire social matrix surrounding the infant and will allow a better understanding not only of his relationship with the infant and the significance of that relationship, but also of his relationship with the infant in relation to the other significant persons in the infant's environment who may serve to influence both father and infant.

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